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REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON CONFERENCES*

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I. CALENDAR OF CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS

A. Matters related to, and inter-sessional departures from, the approved calendar for 1994

[To be included in A/48/32/Rev.1]

B. Adoption of the draft calendar of conferences and meetings for 1994-1995

[To be included in A/48/32/Rev.1]

C. Improved utilization of conference-servicing resources: meeting statistics of United Nations organs

Introduction and overview

1. Since 1983, the Committee on Conferences has studied a series of reports showing the meeting statistics of a number of United Nations organs in New York, Geneva and Vienna. At its 323rd meeting, on 28 August 1990, the Committee agreed to put into experimental use a newly proposed methodology to run parallel with the existing methodology for the next three years. 1/

2. At its 341st meeting, on 27 August 1992, the Committee, inter alia, requested the Secretariat to expand the representational sample of bodies included in future papers on the experimental methodology and to provide a historical perspective of the trends perceived in all future reports on the utilization of conference-servicing resources.

3. In view of its earlier decisions and the requests of the General Assembly contained in paragraphs 13 and 14 of resolution 47/202 A of 22 December 1992, the Committee reviewed two reports at its 348th meeting, on 18 May 1993, one compiled in accordance with existing methodology (A/AC.172/88/Add.11) and one compiled in accordance with the new methodology (A/AC.172/1993/CRP.4).

Discussion

4. The view was expressed that, while the experimental methodology constituted a welcome improvement in assessing the utilization of conference resources, it should be further refined, inter alia, by including analysis and commentary, as well as capacity utilization figures.

5. It was suggested that the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences should hold consultations with the chairmen of the bodies concerned and that the secretariat of the Committee should consult with the secretariats of those bodies in view of the continuity that they provided. While the collection of data on utilization was an interesting exercise in itself, the reason for doing so was to reverse the poor performance of under-utilizers and of those bodies that regularly failed to comply with the rules on the control, limitation and submission of documentation. It was suggested that a higher benchmark figure might be a stimulus in that regard.

6. Although the data did not reveal any clear patterns, the delay in the submission of documentation and inaccurate planning were believed to be factors in the under-utilization of conference resources.

7. Clarification was sought and received from the Secretariat regarding the methodologies used and the data presented.

Conclusions and recommendations

8. The Committee looked forward to receiving information on the consultations held with the chairmen of bodies that had consistently utilized less than 75 per cent of their allocated resources for the last three sessions.

9. The Committee agreed to continue with the experimental methodology, and requested the Secretariat to expand the information presented to include analyses of trends perceived and capacity utilization figures.

10. The Committee requested the Secretariat to spare no effort to comply with the six-week rule and to intensify interdepartmental consultations designed to improve performance in utilization and compliance indices.

11. The Committee decided to raise the minimum rate for utilization, the benchmark figure, of conference-servicing resources to 80 per cent, pending further analysis of the expanded methodology.

12. The Committee recommended to the General Assembly that it should invite those bodies whose utilization factor is below the benchmark figure for three sessions to review and revise, if necessary, the amount of conference-servicing resources requested.

D. Improved organization of work and effective use of conference resources

1. Existing conference resources, services and facilities within the United Nations

Introduction and overview

13. At its 314th meeting, on 21 August 1990, the Committee considered the report of the Secretary-General on existing conference resources, services and facilities within the United Nations (A/AC.172/137), as well as a conference room paper on conference servicing at the United Nations (A/AC.172/1990/CRP.2), and requested the Secretariat to provide supplemental information for discussion by the Committee at its next session.

14. At its 332nd meeting, on 21 August 1991, the Committee considered a conference room paper prepared by the Secretariat on the item (A/AC.172/1991/CRP.6).

15. During the consideration of the agenda item entitled "Pattern of conferences" in the Fifth Committee during the forty-sixth session of the General Assembly, it was suggested that there should be information available on existing conference services, resources and facilities system-wide, which could lead to a more effective organization of work and use of conference services. At its 348th meeting, on 18 May, and at its 349th and 350th meetings, on 19 May 1993, the Committee reviewed a report of the Secretary-General on existing conference resources, services and facilities within the United Nations system (A/AC.172/152).

Discussion

16. Information was requested on the utilization rate of conference centres, types of conferences, costs and the use of conference facilities provided free of charge by Governments. Information was also requested on any imbalance in staffing, including levels of posts between centres, in particular at Vienna, and the situation at the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. Further analysis of the information given in the report (A/AC.172/152) was needed.

17. The existence of non-United Nations conference facilities at various centres to which the Organization had routine access free of charge was noted, and attention was drawn to the need for coordination embracing the use of all available facilities. Ownership by the Organization was not necessarily an important factor, provided access was assured.

Conclusions and recommendations

18. The Committee took note of the information presented in the report of the Secretary-General (A/AC.172/152). It requested the Secretariat to provide further analysis, including data on the level of the staff posts listed in the report, on the nature of the meetings convened and on capacity utilization at each of the headquarters, regional commissions and other organizations and on comparative costs of meetings in New York, Geneva and Vienna, and further information on facilities provided free of charge by Governments or organizations within and outside the United Nations system.

19. Further, the Committee requested the Secretariat to make proposals on measures to optimize the utilization of conference services in the most cost-effective manner possible.

20. The Committee decided to consider this question in future under the item entitled "Improved utilization of conference-servicing resources".

2. Measures to improve the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the use of conference-servicing resources

[To be included in A/48/32/Rev.1]

3. Conference services at Vienna

Introduction and overview

21. At its 343rd meeting, on 2 March 1993, the Committee decided to consider the question of conference services at Vienna. At its 351st meeting, on 20 May 1993, the Committee reviewed a note by the Secretariat on the item (A/AC.172/1993/CRP.5).

Discussion

22. The representative of the Secretariat explained that efforts to reach agreement with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) concerning the establishment of unified conference services were continuing. In the absence of such an agreement, preparations were under way for the establishment of a separate United Nations conference service at Vienna.

23. The view was expressed that the steps being taken were appropriate, and that the establishment of unified conference services would be more rational and less costly. The reasons for the lack of agreement on such an approach were not clear, particularly given the preference expressed by the General Assembly for unified conference services.

24. The Secretariat indicated that a pro tempore arrangement for the allocation of conference services on a joint basis, originally concluded when UNIDO had become a specialized agency, had been continued on pragmatic grounds owing to failure to agree on a permanent arrangement.

Conclusions and recommendations

25. The Committee took note of the information contained in the note by the Secretariat (A/AC.172/1993/CRP.5).

26. Bearing in mind General Assembly resolution 44/201 A of 21 December 1989, the Committee decided to recommend to the Assembly that it should request the Secretary-General to pursue his efforts with a view to reaching agreement with UNIDO concerning the establishment of unified conference services administered by the United Nations.

27. The Committee requested the Secretariat to prepare an extensive background paper describing the origins and evolution of the question, and the two positions taken on it, to be submitted to the Committee at its resumed substantive session of 1993, and decided to remain seized of the question.

E. Consideration of the draft calendar of conferences and meetings of subsidiary organs of the Economic and Social Council for 1994-1995

Introduction and overview

28. In its decision 1988/103 of 5 February 1988, the Economic and Social Council invited the Committee on Conferences to review the Council's draft biennial calendar of conferences and meetings and to submit, as appropriate, its recommendations thereon to the Council.

29. At its 351st meeting, on 20 May 1993, the Committee considered the aforementioned draft calendar of conferences and meetings (A/AC.172/1993/CRP.13, E/1993/L.20).

Discussion

30. The question of the biennialization of conferences and meetings referred to in recommendation 2 (b) of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts to Review the Efficiency of the Administrative and Financial Functioning of the United Nations, 2/ as endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 41/213 of 19 December 1986, was recalled.

31. Clarification was sought and received from the Secretariat regarding various aspects of the provisional calendar of conferences and meetings for 1994 and 1995 in the economic, social and related fields.

Conclusions and recommendations

32. The Committee noted that, in accordance with paragraph 2 (f) (i) of Economic and Social Council resolution 1988/77 of 29 July 1988, in the draft calendar submitted by the Secretary-General, the subsidiary bodies of the Council were, to the extent possible, scheduled to end their 1994-1995 sessions at least eight weeks prior to the dates scheduled for the sessions of the Council.

33. Concern was expressed regarding the increased number of requests of intergovernmental bodies for exceptions to the biennialization of their sessions, particularly in view of the fact that such requests did not result in sessions of shorter duration.

34. The Committee wished to encourage the Council to continue its consideration of the biennialization of meetings of its subsidiary bodies.

35. The Committee noted with appreciation the action taken by the Council in 1992 concerning the discontinuance of summary records for its sessional committees, and for some subsidiary bodies.

36. The Committee recommended the adoption of the draft calendar of conferences and meetings of the Economic and Social Council (E/1993/L.20), while noting that the venues of some bodies affected by the restructuring, under General Assembly resolution 47/212 B of 6 May 1993, might be reviewed.

F. Requests for exceptions to section I, paragraph 7, of General Assembly resolution 40/243

[To be included in A/48/32/Rev.1]

II. IMPROVED COORDINATION OF CONFERENCES WITHIN THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM: IMPLEMENTATION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 43/222 B, PARAGRAPH 4 (f)

Introduction and overview

1. At its 300th meeting, on 24 August 1989, the Committee agreed that it should examine how it could best address its terms of reference as governed by paragraph 4 (f) of General Assembly resolution 43/222 B of 21 December 1988 and requested the Secretariat to examine the current status of coordination, identifying any difficulties or problems and suggesting possible solutions with a view to making the necessary improvements. The Committee further requested its Chairman to address a letter to the Chairman of the Administrative Committee on Coordination in order to avail itself of the opportunity to benefit from that Committee's views. Subsequently, the Organizational Committee of the Administrative Committee on Coordination decided to refer the matter to the Inter-Agency Meeting for Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications.

2. At its 328th meeting, on 19 August 1991, the Committee took note of the progress report provided by the Secretariat. At its 349th and 350th meetings, on 19 May 1993, the Committee reviewed a note by the Secretariat on the item, including information on action taken by the Administrative Committee on Coordination (A/AC.172/1993/CRP.3).

Discussion

3. The representative of the Secretariat indicated that inter-agency coordination and consultation, including the systematic exchange of information and language staff, were in place in the United Nations system, particularly at duty stations where a number of specialized agencies were located.

4. It was noted that the primary focus in terms of coordination was appropriate at the regional level, and that such coordination, including thematic coordination, would ensure the effective participation by Member States in meetings and optimize the use of limited conference-servicing resources. Such coordination should be furthered. In that connection, an appropriate computerized information system, particularly at Geneva, where a large number of specialized agencies are based, should be developed to allow information regarding schedules of meetings to be readily available.

5. The organization of world conferences should take into account the capacities of Member States and of the United Nations system and related agencies.

6. It was noted that conclusions presented in the note by the Secretariat were valid. Exchanges of permanent language staff among organizations of the United Nations system and related agencies as a factor in the cost-effective use of permanent conference staff were welcomed, although such an arrangement would not necessarily obviate the need for additional freelance staff, as the number of staff that could be loaned was probably limited.

Conclusions and recommendations

7. The Committee noted with appreciation the level of coordination within the United Nations system and related agencies, especially at given duty stations, and the agreement reached with regard to establishing a systematic exchange of

information and language staff within the system to promote effective utilization of conference staff.

8. The Committee decided to recommend to the General Assembly that it should request the Secretary-General, as Chairman of the Administrative Committee on Coordination, through the established mechanism of the Inter-Agency Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications, to enhance system-wide coordination of conference activities, including coordination of meetings schedules, with a view to optimizing the use of available conference services, resources and facilities, with due regard to quality, and making possible the effective participation of Member States, and to report on the results achieved to the General Assembly at its fiftieth session, through the Committee on Conferences.

9. The Committee also wished to emphasize that any decisions to convene world conferences should take into account the impact of such conferences on the capacity of the United Nations system to provide conference services and the capacity of Member States to participate in them.

III. CONTROL AND LIMITATION OF DOCUMENTATION

A. Provision of written meeting records to subsidiary bodies of the General Assembly

Introduction and overview

1. In its resolution 36/117 A of 10 December 1981, the General Assembly requested the Committee on Conferences to undertake a comprehensive study of the rationale that determined the provision of meeting records to United Nations organs. Having considered the report of the Committee, the Assembly, in its resolution 37/14 C of 16 November 1982, decided that, for an experimental period of three years, no subsidiary organ of the Assembly should be entitled to summary records, with the seven exceptions laid down in that resolution.

2. That experimental period was subsequently extended until 31 December 1990 by General Assembly resolutions 40/243, 41/177 D and 44/196 B. In its resolution 45/238 B of 21 December 1990, the General Assembly decided that, pending a further decision of the Assembly on the recommendations of the Committee on Conferences, no subsidiary organ of the Assembly should be entitled to summary records, with the exception of the seven bodies specified in resolution 37/14 C. The Assembly also decided that summary records would continue to be provided to regular and special sessions of the following governing bodies: the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; and the Governing Council of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

3. In paragraph 14 of its resolution 47/202 B of 22 December 1992, the General Assembly welcomed the decision of the Committee on Conferences to review the criteria for, status of and guidelines on the provision of written meeting records, and requested the Committee, taking into account the costs of conference servicing, to report thereon to the Assembly at its forty-eighth session with concrete recommendations. In paragraph 18 of that resolution, the Assembly requested the Secretariat to pursue the possibility of issuing the verbatim records of the Security Council in final form only, on the understanding that those records would be issued as promptly as the provisional ones are issued at present.

4. At its 347th meeting, on 18 May 1993, the Committee on Conferences reviewed notes by the Secretariat on the criteria for, status of and guidelines on the provision of written meeting records (A/AC.172/1993/CRP.6) and on the possibility of issuing the verbatim records of the Security Council in final form only (A/AC.172/1993/CRP.7).

Discussion

5. The representative of the Secretariat informed the Committee that the two criteria established by the General Assembly for the provision of summary records to a body were that its subject-matter should be sufficiently substantive and that the cost should be in proportion to the benefit derived. The Office of Conference Services was experiencing some difficulty in the production of summary records, and sought the Committee's guidance in that connection. The possibility was being considered of issuing verbatim records of the Security Council in final form only.

6. The view was expressed that meeting records should be provided for political and legal bodies, while others should reconsider their need for records. Although sound recordings might be considered as an alternative, their use would not reflect the rationale that determined the provisions of written records. Despite the delays in the issuance of summary records, they were of value, particularly for smaller delegations. To issue summary records in the original language version without waiting for translation into other languages would violate the principles of simultaneous distribution and equal treatment of all official languages, laid down in General Assembly resolutions 36/117 B and 42/207 C, respectively.

7. In spite of the effects of the introduction of technological innovations, the increase in the workload, the reduced staffing and the freezing of certain posts in the Office of Conference Services have resulted in a deterioration with respect to the timely issuance of summary and verbatim records of United Nations bodies. In that context, it was the general view that, unless that trend were reversed, the relevant capacity of the Office to cope with the situation needed to be strengthened.

8. Regret was expressed, but not generally, that only one subsidiary organ had responded to the request of the General Assembly, in its resolution 37/14 C, to dispense with written meeting records whenever possible.

Conclusions and recommendations

9. The Committee reaffirmed the need for and desirability of written meeting records for some bodies of a political or legal nature.

10. Bearing in mind General Assembly resolution 45/238 B, the Committee recommended that the Assembly should instruct all bodies currently entitled to written meeting records to review the need for such records, with a view to deciding whether they should be discontinued or maintained for some or all of their meetings, and communicate their recommendations to the Assembly at its forty-ninth session.

B. Implementation of the rules and regulations on control and limitation of documentation: compliance with the six-week rule for the issuance of pre-session documentation

Introduction and overview

11. At its 336th meeting, on 24 August 1992, the Committee considered a note by the Secretariat on compliance with the six-week rule for the issuance of pre-session documentation (A/AC.172/1992/CRP.5).

12. The Committee, inter alia, decided to repeat and strongly confirm its insistence on full compliance with the six-week rule. By paragraph 12 of its resolution 47/202 B, the General Assembly urged subsidiary organs to review their agendas with a view to enabling the Secretariat to comply with the six-week rule, inter alia, through combining agenda items and limiting requests for pre-session documentation, and requested the Secretary-General to inform the subsidiary organs of that appeal and to report orally to the Committee on Conferences on the measures taken to that effect.

13. At its 347th and 350th meetings, on 18 and 19 May 1993, the Committee considered an interim report on the matter (A/AC.172/1993/CRP.8), on the

understanding that supplementary information would be presented at its substantive session of 1994.

Discussion

14. The representative of the Secretariat stated that the conference room paper (A/AC.175/1993/CRP.8) was an interim report only, outlining the problems faced by the Office of Conference Services owing to the increase in the volume of documentation and the late submission of documents by author departments. There was a need for closer coordination and dialogue with those departments.

15. It was noted that a serious situation existed regarding the timely issuance of documentation, owing to increased workload, late submission by author departments and inadequate resources, and the view was expressed that the problem must be tackled at the first stage of the process, with greater accountability on the part of those responsible for documentation. Incentives to encourage compliance with the 10-week rule should be identified. Late submissions should not be accorded priority over timely submissions.

16. The view was expressed that adequate permanent staffing and resources must be provided for the Office of Conference Services. The management of workload, coordination and training were important, and the approaches outlined in sections III and IV of the paper should be developed further.

17. In order to ensure full compliance with the six-week rule by the Secretariat, Member States as members of intergovernmental bodies should, under an appropriate existing agenda item, review agendas seeking to combine items so as to effect an overall reduction in requests for documentation.

18. The Secretariat clarified points arising in the discussion, and noted that proposals for additional resources would be prepared for the next biennium. It was hoped to place greater emphasis on training and coordination to bring about an improvement in submissions and in the overall situation.

Conclusions and recommendations

19. The Committee took note of the preliminary findings and recommendations as contained in sections III and IV of the interim report (A/AC.172/1993/CRP.8).

20. The Committee encouraged the Secretariat to strengthen the training programme designed for those responsible for the preparation of parliamentary documentation and the planning and forecasting functions in both author departments and the Office of Conference Services. The Committee stressed the need for the Office to have adequate resources to deal with the growing workload and to enable it better to comply with the deadlines set by the General Assembly for the submission of documentation.

21. The Committee requested the Office of Conference Services to identify incentives to ensure compliance on the part of substantive departments with the 10-week rule and to report to the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session on measures taken and the impact of the implementation of that rule.

22. The Committee decided to recommend to the General Assembly that it should invite intergovernmental bodies and their members to review their agendas with a view, inter alia, to combining agenda items and limiting requests for pre-session documentation.

23. The Committee requested the Secretariat to proceed with the report to be submitted to the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session, as outlined in the interim report, taking into account the views expressed during the discussion.

IV. MEETINGS OF ORGANS AND PROGRAMMES NOT FUNDED FROM THE REGULAR BUDGET OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Introduction and overview

1. In paragraph 19 of its resolution 46/190 of 20 December 1991, the General Assembly requested the Committee on Conferences to continue to monitor the meetings services provided to organs and programmes not funded from the regular budget and to consider the impact of their scheduling on the calendar of conferences and meetings.

2. In paragraph 9 of its resolution 47/202 A of 22 December 1992, the General Assembly invited the Executive Board of UNICEF and the Governing Council of UNDP to continue to evaluate their meeting and documentation requirements, with a view to rationalizing them, and to report on progress made to the Assembly at its forty-eighth session, through the Committee on Conferences.

3. At its 345th and 348th meetings, on 17 and 18 May 1993, the Committee considered the question on the basis of two notes by the Secretariat (A/AC.172/1993/CRP.1 and A/AC.172/1993/CRP.2).

Discussion

4. The view was expressed that the governing bodies of UNICEF and UNDP should be encouraged to continue their efforts to reduce the number of meetings and the volume of documentation.

5. Clarification was sought and received from the Secretariat regarding the electronic transfer of documentation of the Executive Board of UNICEF. It was suggested that the equal treatment of all official languages should be borne in mind in the implementation of such a procedure, that the six-week rule for availability of pre-session documentation should be respected and that the quality of conference services should not be impaired.

6. In reply to a query concerning additional staff to meet the requirements of the Governing Council of UNDP, the representative of UNDP indicated that some reimbursement was made by UNDP to the United Nations Secretariat in respect of overtime and contractual translation costs. The representative of the Secretariat noted that it was usual to hire additional staff when the two subsidiary bodies met, as their meetings were scheduled at particularly busy times of the year for the Organization as a whole.

7. In reply to another query, the representative of the Secretariat noted that, in accordance with the rules of procedure of each body, summary records were prepared in the working languages only. The view was expressed that due respect should be paid to the equal treatment of all official languages of the United Nations in the summary records of UNICEF and UNDP. It was also suggested that the two governing bodies could dispense with summary records.

8. The representative of the Secretariat also replied to a query regarding 1993 statistics for the Executive Board of UNICEF.

Conclusions and recommendations

9. The Committee took note of the efforts undertaken by the Executive Board of UNICEF and the Governing Council of UNDP to rationalize their meeting and documentation requirements.

10. The Committee decided to recommend to the General Assembly that it should invite the two subsidiary bodies, within the context of the restructuring exercise in the economic and social sectors, to increase their efforts to rationalize their meeting and documentation requirements with a view to reducing them to the maximum extent possible.

11. The Committee considered that the Executive Board of UNICEF and the Governing Council of UNDP could possibly dispense with summary records. Therefore, it decided to recommend that the General Assembly should invite those bodies to consider taking action along those lines. In the event that summary records were maintained, the two bodies were invited to examine the possibility of issuing their official records in Arabic also.

12. The Committee, taking account of the decision of the Executive Board of UNICEF that the Executive Director should undertake a technical and financial analysis of the electronic transfer of Executive Board documentation, wished to draw the attention of the Executive Board to the fact that that decision should be implemented taking into account the need to ensure the equal treatment of all official languages, pursuant to resolution 42/207 C, the need to comply with the six-week rule for availability of pre-session documentation and the need to ensure that the quality of conference services is not impaired.

13. The Committee further decided to continue to monitor the conference services provided to organs and programmes not funded from the regular budget of the United Nations.

V. APPLICATION OF NEW TECHNOLOGY TO CONFERENCE SERVICING

Introduction and overview

1. During its substantive session of 1990, the Committee considered a conference room paper on the application of new technology to conference servicing. The Committee noted that, with its responsibility for making recommendations on conference servicing world wide, it should be fully informed of applications of new technologies, present and planned, for all conference centres of the United Nations, including those at the regional commissions. At the same session, the Committee requested the Secretariat to report to the Committee at its 1991 session on the system of interdepartmental cooperation of the Secretariat in the area of technology.

2. At its 328th meeting, on 19 August 1991, the Committee considered a conference room paper prepared by the Secretariat on the subject (A/AC.172/1991/CRP.7). The Committee decided to continue monitoring the applications of new technologies in the area of conference servicing, taking into account the conclusions and observations agreed upon.

3. At its 346th meeting, on 17 May 1993, the Committee considered a note by the Secretariat on the item (A/AC.172/1993/CRP.9).

Discussion

4. The Secretariat informed the Committee that the general objective of the application of new technology was to increase the cost-effectiveness and enhance the quality and timeliness of conference services, to which end a number of applications were being introduced, focused on documentation and meetings.

5. The positive results of the introduction of new technology reflected in the paper were welcomed. The productivity gains recorded were only the beginning, and workload standards would need to be reviewed accordingly. Nevertheless, an improvement in quality was the paramount concern. Emphasis was placed on training in order to meet that concern.

6. The overall strategy indicated was welcomed, but the wish was expressed that the Secretariat should prepare an overall plan providing a clear indication of which innovations would be introduced, and when and where. It was important to introduce new technology at all conference centres as evenly as possible. Compatibility between systems was important.

7. The Secretariat indicated that staff had received technological innovations with enthusiasm. Training was being provided, and the importance of compatibility was recognized. An overall plan could be prepared in time for the next session of the Committee.

Conclusions and recommendations

8. Welcoming the benefits reported from the application of technological innovations to conference servicing, including gains in productivity and reductions in costs, the Committee emphasized that the primary goal of the introduction of new technology should be to enhance the quality of conference services and ensure their timely provision. Productivity gains from the technological innovations should be directed towards that goal, rather than cost reduction for its own sake.

9. The Committee drew attention to the importance of forecasting and planning and requested the Secretariat to include in a report to be submitted in 1994 information on the long-range plan and the detailed time-frame for the introduction of each new application of new technology at each duty station. The Committee urged that the application of new technology should, to the extent possible, be introduced evenly throughout all the United Nations conference centres.

VI. UNITED NATIONS PUBLICATIONS POLICY: IMPLEMENTATION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 43/222 B, PARAGRAPH 4 (h)

Introduction and overview

1. At its 335th meeting, on 24 August 1992, the Committee reviewed a conference room paper that contained an annotated provisional outline of the report mandated by General Assembly resolution 46/185 B, section VI (A/AC.172/1992/CRP.1). At the same meeting, the Committee requested the Secretariat to proceed with the report on publications as outlined in the conference room paper, taking into account the views expressed during the discussion.

2. At its 346th meeting, on 17 May 1993, the Committee considered the draft report of the Secretary-General on United Nations publications policy (A/AC.172/153, annex).

Discussion

3. The view was expressed that the distinction between documents and publications should be formally established. Doubts were stated as to the value of *ex post facto* reviews of publications to ensure criteria were met. In particular it was important for current criteria to be applied strictly and for intergovernmental bodies to review recurrent publications to ensure that valid mandates existed, as done by the Statistical Commission.

4. The quality, timeliness and cost-effectiveness of the documents on which intergovernmental bodies based their work were of primary concern, while a market-oriented approach should be taken towards publications.

5. The Secretariat provided clarification of various elements of the report, confirming that coordination was undertaken with other United Nations organizations and feedback sought from end-users. While many documents and publications were produced internally, some use was made of external expertise at every stage. The internal processing and production of publications was scheduled so as not to interfere with the priority production of parliamentary documents. Information was also given on net revenues from sales of publications, specifically from external publishing arrangements.

Conclusions and recommendations

6. The Committee recommended that its comments and observations should be taken into account in the preparation of the final report of the Secretary-General on publications policy to be submitted to the General Assembly at its forty-eighth session.

VII. WAYS AND MEANS FOR A MORE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE COMMITTEE ON CONFERENCES: IMPLEMENTATION OF PARAGRAPH 3 OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 47/202 C

Introduction and overview

1. In paragraph 3 of its resolution 47/202 C of 22 December 1992, the General Assembly urged the Committee on Conferences to continue to explore ways and means for a more effective implementation of its terms of reference as set out in resolution 43/222 B and the relevant recommendations of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts to Review the Efficiency of the Administrative and Financial Functioning of the United Nations, 2/ as approved by the General Assembly in its resolution 41/213, with a view to ensuring the optimum utilization of conference-servicing resources, via, inter alia, minimizing wastage and the rationalization of meeting programmes and documentation requirements.

2. At its 343rd meeting, on 2 March 1993, the Committee decided to include in its agenda for 1993 an item entitled "Ways and means for a more effective implementation of the terms of reference of the Committee on Conferences: implementation of paragraph 3 of General Assembly resolution 47/202 C", and requested the Secretariat to submit a written report on that question.

3. At its 350th meeting, on 19 May 1993, the Committee considered a note by the Secretariat on the question (A/AC.172/1993/CRP.10).

Conclusions and recommendations

4. The Committee agreed that, on the whole, it had been functioning within its terms of reference. None the less, the terms of reference were less comprehensive than those envisaged by the High-level Group. The Committee agreed with the conclusion in the note by the Secretariat that it might concentrate its efforts on playing more of an informational role vis-à-vis subsidiary organs, providing clear directives to the Secretariat and setting standards.

5. The Committee reviewed the activities undertaken in fulfilment of its terms of reference, as set out in General Assembly resolution 43/222 B, and concluded that the mandate continued to provide an appropriate basis for its work, but that in future it should also strengthen its action in establishing standards and heightening awareness.

6. The Committee decided to keep the implementation of its mandate under review in the light of further developments related to conference-servicing requirements.

VIII. REVIEW OF THE PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1994-1995: CONFERENCE SERVICES

[To be included in A/48/32/Rev.1]

IX. REVIEW OF THE OFFICE OF CONFERENCE SERVICES

Introduction and overview

1. Pursuant to paragraph 2 (c) of General Assembly resolution 47/202 C, the Secretary-General was to submit, if necessary, recommendations on possible restructuring of the Office of Conference Services to the Assembly at its forty-eighth session through the Committee on Conferences and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions. Inasmuch as the Secretary-General's proposals on the restructuring of the Office were to be contained in the revised estimates for 1992-1993, at its organizational meeting, held on 2 March 1993, the Committee decided to consider the question in March prior to consideration thereof in the Fifth Committee.

2. At its 344th meeting, held on 26 March 1993, the Committee considered the question of the review of the Office of Conference Services in accordance with the aforementioned decision, on the basis of the report of the Secretary-General on the revised estimates (A/C.5/47/88, paras. 144-155).

Discussion

3. In introducing the item, the representative of the Secretariat described the new organizational structure of the Office of Conference Services. Clarification was sought and received regarding the redistribution of publishing functions among three organizational units, namely the Office of Conference Services, the Office of General Services and the Department of Public Information. The Office of Conference Services would continue to provide Secretariat services to the Committee on Conferences and remain responsible for preparing and submitting reports to that body. The restructuring would in no way modify the respective mandates of the Committee on Conferences and the Committee on Information.

4. As to queries raised about possible delays, inefficiency or increased costs, the Secretariat assured the Committee that the restructuring would not affect the preparation of parliamentary documentation. Indeed, the same procedure would be followed for the processing of such documentation. Moreover, in meeting its new responsibilities, the Department of Public Information had at its disposal the resources formerly available to the Office of Conference Services in planning and administering the publications programme.

5. With regard to the informal study carried out by external consultants, the representative of the Secretariat stated that the consultants' suggestions concerning the possible use of machine-assisted translation of documents were being followed up by the services concerned.

6. Concern was expressed that the report of the Secretary-General lacked overview in terms of the direction, duration and finality of the restructuring.

Conclusions and recommendations

7. The Chairman addressed the following letter to the Chairman of the Fifth Committee:

"The General Assembly, in paragraph 2 (c) of resolution 47/202 C, requested the Secretary-General to submit, if necessary, recommendations on possible restructuring of the Office of Conference Services at its forty-eighth session through the Committee on Conferences and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions.

"Inasmuch as the Secretary-General's proposals on the restructuring of the Office of Conference Services were to be contained in the revised estimates for 1992-1993, at its organizational meeting, held on 2 March 1993, the Committee on Conferences decided to consider the matter in March prior to consideration thereof in the Fifth Committee. Accordingly, at its 344th meeting, on 26 March 1993, the Committee considered the revised estimates for the Office of Conference Services for 1992-1993.

"The Committee noted that the purpose of the restructuring was to enhance the efficiency and smooth functioning of the Secretariat and was of the view that the process should be undertaken in a comprehensive and integrated manner and within a specified period of time.

"The Committee also noted that the proposed restructuring within the Department of Administration and Management would result in a gap between the head of the Department at the level of Under-Secretary-General and heads of offices at the D-2 level.

"The Committee sought assurance that the redistribution of publishing functions among three organizational units, namely the Office of Conference Services, the Office of General Services and the Department of Public Information, would not result in increased costs or delays or inefficiencies in the processing of parliamentary documentation, noting that there was a close link between documents processing and the effective management of meetings. The Committee also drew attention to its mandate to monitor the policy of the Organization on publications, and requested the Secretariat to ensure that appropriate services were provided to the Committee on Conferences through close coordination between the Office of Conference Services and the Department of Public Information."

X. ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

A. Membership

1. The General Assembly, in its resolution 43/222 B, decided to retain the Committee on Conferences as a permanent subsidiary organ. Pursuant to that resolution, the Committee for 1993 was composed of the following Member States: Austria, Chile, Cyprus, Fiji, France, Gabon, Grenada, Honduras, Hungary, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, Russian Federation, Senegal, Turkey and United States of America.

B. Officers

2. The Committee elected the following officers to serve in 1993:

Chairman: Mr. Mahmoud Barimani (Islamic Republic of Iran)

Vice-Chairmen: Mr. Avni Karslioglu (Turkey)
Mr. Fernando Varela (Chile)
Mr. El Hassane Zahid (Morocco)

Rapporteur: Mr. Imre Karbuczky (Hungary)

3. The Committee agreed in principle at its organizational session for 1993 (343rd meeting), on 2 March 1993, that the Chairman would undertake informal consultations with a view to determining the composition of the Committee's Bureau in 1994.

C. Organization of work

4. At its 343rd meeting, the Committee agreed to meet as required to take up matters related to the calendar of conferences and its implementation, in particular the consideration of inter-sessional departures from the approved calendar. At the same meeting, the Committee requested the Secretariat to submit a draft biennial agenda for 1994-1995 at the organizational session for 1994. The Committee held the first part of its substantive session of 1993 from 17 to 21 May 1993.

D. Programme of work

5. At its 334th meeting, on 17 March 1992, the Committee requested the Secretariat to submit to it, at its organizational session for 1993, a draft provisional agenda and biennial programme of work for 1994-1995, which was subsequently issued in document A/AC.172/150 and adopted by the Committee.

6. The Director of Conference Services addressed the Committee at the opening of its organizational and substantive sessions.

XI. WORK OF THE COMMITTEE DURING THE FORTY-SEVENTH SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY, FROM 15 SEPTEMBER TO 23 DECEMBER 1992

No meetings were held by the Committee on Conferences during the forty-seventh session of the General Assembly. However, the Committee was seized with the following requests:

Committee	Request	Action taken
UNITAR, Board of Trustees	To hold a special session at Headquarters, from 16 to 18 December 1992	Recommended to the General Assembly that it authorize an exception to section I, paragraph 7, of resolution 40/243, thereby authorizing the Board of Trustees of UNITAR to meet in accordance with its request.
Preparatory Committee for the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II)	To convene the organizational session in New York, and the first substantive session in New York or Geneva	Recommended to the General Assembly that it grant an exception to section I, paragraph 4, of resolution 40/243, thereby authorizing the Preparatory Committee to meet away from its established headquarters.
Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa	To convene the organizational session in New York, and substantive sessions in New York and Nairobi	Recommended to the General Assembly that it grant an exception to section I, paragraph 4, of resolution 40/243, thereby authorizing the Intergovernmental Committee to meet away from its established headquarters.

Notes

1/ See Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 32 (A/45/32), paras. 25-40.

2/ Ibid., Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 49 (A/41/49).

Annex

DRAFT CALENDAR OF CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS OF THE UNITED NATIONS AND OF THE PRINCIPAL ORGANS OF THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES, AND THE INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY, 1994-1995

[To be included in A/48/32/Rev.1]